

# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Commission on Youth

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### Commission on Youth Announces Adoption of Study Recommendations

**RICHMOND** – Delegate Christopher K. Peace, Chairman of the Virginia Commission on Youth, and Senator Barbara Favola, Vice Chair, are pleased to announce the adoption of legislative recommendations for three of the Commission's 2014 initiatives: the Commission's *Study on Unlawful Adoption, the Use of Restraint and Seclusion in Schools*, and *Early Childhood Education – Workgroup on Quality*. These recommendations seek to protect Virginia's most vulnerable youth while strengthening service delivery to families and children.

The Virginia Commission on Youth is a bipartisan, standing legislative commission of the General Assembly comprised of 12 members (six Delegates, three Senators, and three citizens) that provides a legislative forum addressing the needs of and services to the Commonwealth's youth and their families. The Commission contributes to the General Assembly's ability to make sound policy decisions based on well-studied and reasoned recommendations.

Over the course of the year, the Commission has worked closely with the McAuliffe administration and impacted stakeholders to identify best practices, engage families, and identify policies that research reveals yield the greatest returns. Speaking about the Commission's recommendations, Delegate Christopher K. Peace, Chairman of the Commission on Youth, stated, "The recommendations adopted by the Commission accomplish three critically important goals. First, they will offer increased protections to Virginia's most vulnerable children in the school setting. Second, they will support efforts to provide services to adoptive parents who may be struggling to meet the needs of their children. Third, they will provide extraordinary returns by ensuring our children have access to high quality education from early ages. He added, "I am very pleased that our Commission was able to develop policy recommendations that address these incredibly important topics."

The Commission's Vice-Chair, Senator Barbara Favola stated, "I am thrilled that the Commission adopted recommendations on all of these studies. The recommendations reflect the importance of early childhood development as well as the success of the Virginia Preschool Initiative. The Commission on Youth also understands the urgent need to assess Virginia's existing child care system. We must move to a place where children are safe in every child care setting and receiving high-quality developmentally appropriate instruction."

#### *Summary Review of Recommendations Adopted by the Commission:*

##### *Use of Seclusion and Restraint in Virginia's Schools*

The Commission adopted several recommendations addressing the use of restraint and seclusion in Virginia's public schools. The Commission will introduce legislation during the 2015 General Assembly requiring the Virginia Board of Education to promulgate regulations for the use of seclusion and restraint in public schools. The regulations will address criteria for use, training, parental notification, and follow-up. During the course of the study, the Commission met with family members, advocacy organizations, and school officials. This recommendation addresses concerns raised by family members who stated that schools reliance upon guidelines allows for discretion pertaining to the use of seclusion and restraint as well as notifying parents when it is used. The Commission sought to address these concerns while acknowledging the distinct emotional and physical developmental difference of students. The Commission also adopted a recommendation encouraging the Governor to finalize regulations

governing private day schools for students with disabilities and supporting efforts to provide school officials with resources and training in techniques to reduce the use of seclusion and restraint.

#### *Study on Unlawful Adoption*

The Commission recently finalized the *Study on Unlawful Adoption*. This study reviewed the existence of "re-homing," which occurs when a child is removed from one adoptive family and placed in another home without following established adoption procedures. Children who are re-homed are extremely vulnerable and are at great risk for human trafficking and abuse. The Commission adopted several recommendations to strengthen post-adoptive services for these families. Adoptive families may confront a variety of challenges because their children may have been abused, neglected, and have ongoing emotional, developmental, physical, or behavioral difficulties. The Commission also adopted a recommendation that asks the Governor to ensure there is adequate funding in the 2014-2016 Appropriations Act to fund fully the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, which would extend foster care and adoption assistance until the age of 21. Doing so would allow the Commonwealth to draw down partial federal reimbursement for support of young adults in the 19 to 21 age group. Youth who receive this type of assistance are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to end up homeless or become involved in the criminal justice system.

#### *Early Childhood Education – Workgroup on Quality*

In the first five years of life, a child undergoes the most dramatic brain growth and development over the course of his lifetime. In June, the Commission hosted the Early Childhood Education Workgroup on Quality. The Workgroup brought members of the General Assembly, Executive Branch and stakeholders together to investigate ways Virginia can invest in high-quality early childhood education. Quality early childhood education is critical to success in school and the future workforce. Investments in high-quality early education have demonstrated a \$3-15 return on investment.

The Commission adopted several recommendations from the workgroup to enhance quality. One recommendation is the creation of an interagency workgroup to develop a competency-based professional development framework for early childhood teachers. The workgroup will also consider a child care system where all providers, including home-based providers, obtain a child care license. The workgroup will study ways to achieve this goal by September 1, 2017. The Commission adopted a recommendation requesting further study of ways to improve access to the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The Commission also adopted a recommendation to address the lack of high-quality early childhood programs for Virginia's military families and tracking the progress of Virginia's kindergarten readiness assessment program.

Additional information about the Commission on Youth and the Commission's initiatives can be obtained on the Commission's website at <http://vcoy.virginia.gov>.

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